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Chapter VIII. Songs and Legends

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533 Singing is an important aspect of Miao life. Regardless of sex and age, almost all of them are talented singers. When we were traveling in the Miao mountains, the clear voices of Miao singers always struck our ears. In the deep woods of the high mountains with no one in sight, it usually gave us the poetic feeling that,

"The singing has ended; no one is in sight;
Only some mountain peaks remain green above the river."

831 152 533 Singing is the most natural medium of communication between human hearts. The Miao have made full use of it. When a man and woman fall in love, they sing to each other in order to express their mutual admiration. Inexpressibly happy at a reunion after a long separation, they sing to each other to express their happiness. Bidding farewell at a crossroad, they sing to express their sorrow at parting. Worn out during the busy seasons of agricultural work, they sing for physical relaxation. On festive occasions, they sing to add to the gaiety. In short, all their emotions—misery and happiness, grief and joy—are frankly expressed by singing.

533 Usually they sing their songs in dialogue style—such as between a man and a woman or between a host and a guest, etc. Due to long use, many of the songs have become formalized, so that the words of the replies are fixed. The ability to sing is very important in Miao social relations. For instance, their marriage is usually 584 based upon love. And singing is the principal means of courting.

533 /71/ On the fine spring days, Miao boys and girls usually go out in groups to sing to one another on the neighboring slopes. As the singers gradually draw closer, at this point, if you are a talented singer capable of answering your counterpart in the proper way, 533 victory will be yours. Otherwise, if the singing beauties move [571] away because of poor answers, how depressed you would feel! At a fine banquet, when the hosts and guests sing alternately to each other, the good singers are always admired by the audience while

/72 cont'd/

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Bringing in the Crops Song

Bringing our grain crops home,
Shen Nung and T'u-ti* are with us as we bring our crops home,

* Shen Nung was a legendary emperor
who is the supposed teacher of husbandry.
T'u-ti is a term for a local divinity.

Escorting us all the way home to their shelter.
Safely placed in the granaries, these crops will draw the envy
of the emperor.
Thank you,
Shen Nung and T'u-ti,
For escorting and protecting the crops all the way home.
When the emperor bestows his attention on us, we'll think of
you.
From the palace in the capital, a messenger will be sent us,
And much glittering gold will accompany him.
The tenure of a hsiu /title of government office/ is only three
years,
But riches and honor come to an official.
For all this we will be much indebted to you,
And your kindness will be borne in the mind of the emperor
forever.

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539 (2) Songs connected with social activities, such as the one cited in Chapter IV; "The Song of the Old Villager."

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831 (3) Songs related to love between the sexes. For example, when an unmarried man and woman happen to run into each other in the street, the following is frequently sung:

First admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
Show how you feel according to your heart's desire.
What you desire is seen by others,

/72 cont'd/

533 Just as plainly as the sun on the east and the sky on the west.
539 /73/ Second admonition to you, my precious flower, in this
831 world,
If one drinks as much as one wants at a feast,
People will say that like rowing a boat while ignoring the water--
Drinking as much as one wants is a waste.
Third admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
If you are willing, for 10,000 autumns,
We'll join hands together;
On the bridge over the tangling rivers, we'll walk side by side.
Fourth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
If you find someone to join you at romantic eighteen;
You can live happily up to sixty.
Unhappy and middle-aged, that is a waste.
Sixth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
When your brother comes here to stay for a while.
If he is against me, I will not please him even if I slaughter
a dragon to treat him.
If he is agreeable, he will be pleased with a glass of cold water.
Seventh admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
If you hide a man in your room, that is a waste.
Moreover, I fear your man will be killed.
His life will be lost on T'ai-shan mountain and will never re-
turn.
Eighth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
You should not loan your money too freely, if you are rich.
You should be satisfied and not press, even if you cannot get
back your principal.
Otherwise, you will feel regretful if someone kills himself.
Ninth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
When you are in possession of a cow and a piece of land,
You should not hesitate to consider the coming of spring.
When you have no cow you cannot get an early start, even if
spring is here;

/73 cont'd/

533 And a home without a cow is lost.
539 Tenth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
631 You should not stay idle when you see others learn to write,
/74/ Someday should you get involved in a lawsuit,
You'll know the difficulty of getting someone to write for you on a blank sheet of paper.
Eleventh admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
[161] Don't curse and utter foul words to your parents.
You are indebted to your parents for raising you.
Otherwise, your life will be lost on T'ai-shan mountain and will never return.
Twelfth admonition to you, my precious flower, in this world,
When the immortals come to fetch you to the king of the wheel,
You will be referred to the renowned king to receive judgment;
He may decided that you are to be reborn in your youth.

The following songs are frequently sung during such occasions as when a man and woman meet in a rendezvous, or when they bid each other farewell, feeling lost and sorrowful on seeing the loved one depart.

539 631 I. Seeing off my flower,
As the dark clouds see off the moon across the heart of the sky—
The dark clouds are escorting the moon, and in a little while will escort you,
Back to your melancholy land and melancholy home.
Farewell!

II. First farewell to my precious flower who will soon be returning home,
Like the clouds I see leaving the sky.
Looking at the clouds leaving the sky, how sad my humble heart is!
I am hiding my sadness at parting from my love.
Second farewell to my precious flower, from the dragon's noble land,

/74 cont'd/

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Who is leaving this noble land to return home.
In tears I am seeing my flower off;
My tears are hidden in my heart.
Third farewell to my young, romantic sweetheart,
Leaving this noble land, unmindful of herself.
Fourth farewell to my young, noble sweetheart.
Seeing my flower glib and clever, I cannot bear to let her go.
/75/ If you feel sick at heart.../obscure/
Why not come back when halfway, and you'll not have to worry any more!
Fifth farewell to my angel from heavenly T'ao-yüan /an Arcadia/.
With sad thoughts, my tears are falling on my breast.
For you, angel flower, I remained alive.
For you, my flower, I'll end my life.
Sixth farewell to my romantic one— with great pain in my heart.
My grief is piercing my heart like a sharp knife.
There is much danger on the road;
Take care of yourself, while you are far away.
Seventh farewell to my precious dragon flower—with great pain in my heart.
It is like fire burning in my breast.
If fire burned my breast, I would not wish to die.
But if I did not need you /?/, my dragon pearl, I would wish to die.
Eighth farewell to my precious flower, take care on the road.
Pairs of teardrops flow down my breast.
I feel pain in my heart that you are risking your life.
Come back when halfway, and you'll not need to worry anymore.
Ninth farewell to drake and duck*, wealth and fortune are split and scattered.

/75 cont'd/

/* Symbol of conjugal fidelity and happiness. —Ed./

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Every step forward on the road step by step separates us.
Dark leaves are falling off the flowers, birds are leaving the trees.
Thinking sadly of my flower, I cannot bear to let her go.
Tenth farewell, the clouds and rain and the singing are drifting away.
Together we happily dallied here in this place;
Now I am returning to my gloomy house, with tears in my eyes.
Sorrow and depression will be found in the flowers and trees.
Farewell!
I think of our meeting again in the future.
I am staying here in my own native place.
I will wait for you for the next two or three years.
Farewell!
/76/ One day apart means ten thousand days' thinking of you.
After three years' waiting, heaven cannot bid over our wills:
The tie which our former lives predestined will bind us to no more.

III. Riding through Wu-chou Fu on horseback,
Turning my head, I met the fairest one.
Together we were so happy after I met my fairest one with goose-shaped brows.
At night I looked at the five planetary gods /i.e., the stars/, and bowed,
That wealth might befall heaven's gate before the trip,
And gently drop thirteen points better than my own wish.
Water flowed down our faces as we parted /?/,
Separating from my flower, we shall not meet again in this age.
Best wishes to you, my flower, the Goddess of Mercy,

/76 cont'd/

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Like the clouds drifting and turning away from the hills.
Clouds leaving the hills, my thoughts are endless.
Thinking of you, I feel empty and lost that we shall meet no more.
Farewell, my precious one,
Like Hsien-pei seeing off Ying-t'ai,
Ying-t'ai returned to the Jen-ch'a mountains.
But Hsien-pei grieved to death for his flower.
Farewell, my precious one,
Like Tou-nü /"bean girl"/ bidding farewell to Mi-shen /god of rice/,
Mi-shen was bewitched by Tou-nü;
But Tou-nü changed her heart and married another.
Farewell, my precious one,
Like Shih-nü /"tenth girl"/ bidding farewell to T'ang-hsien,
T'ang-hsien went to the capital and was appointed to the office of hsiao-kuan.
And on the way back he met Tuan-yang-ch'un.
Farewell, my precious one,
Like San-nü /"third girl"/ bidding farewell to Han-p'ing.
/77/ Han-p'ing died for San-nü,
As Tsung-huang lost his head because of covetousness.
Farewell, my precious one,
Like Shao-nü /"young girl"/ taking leave of Wen-lung.
I hope that you will remain as fair as Shao-nü.
Like Tung-yung taking leave of Yang-ch'un,
Who sold his body to bury his parents.
I wish I could sell my body at my precious one's native place.
Farewell, my fairest, the autumn lotus.
We shall pursue different roads on our way;
" " " " " " " ".
The moon splits into two parts to return to her path.
Farewell!
With the brush in my hand I'll paint you;

/77 cont'd/

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The picture will be so exactly like you, your face and your brows.
Thinking of you, I'll look at it from time to time.
Farewell!
I'll write about my deep feelings on the Pa-hsien desk;
Writing often will somehow quiet my feelings.
I will not write my verses in double lines.
Clouds and rain bid my autumn lotus away;
Like drawing the knife to cut through the binding vines.
Cutting the vines into two will not cut my fairest from me—
The autumn lotus will resist the cutting without anyone knowing it.
Farewell!
They say my flower hastens past the mountain,
/The next two lines are too obscure to be translated. —Ed./
Farewell, my flower!
Seeing my flower off past Shih-huang,
/78/ Seeing my flower off just past Shih-huang,
Shih-huang draws his hands and does not turn his head.

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(4) Songs sung and answered by the hosts and the guests, taking reciprocal turns, at wedding feasts, are showin in the following several sections:

I. Many thanks to the p'ing-tung /go-between/ who matched this couple.
They have come here today and have met in front of this table.
Carried by ts'ai-huo from Tien-men, village,
They arrived at the bridge; their arrival was announced by the eight carriers.
They passed over the bridge without turning.
Their horoscopes were destined by Heaven.
The alliance was checked in the Wen-ch'ü-an, /?/
They did know that it was stated that they too should meet.
They were not then drake and duck /yüan-yang/ at the House of Yüan-yang.

/107 cont'd/

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584 He took out silver cups to cover the container tops.
/108/ Eight hundred men carried the wealth of gifts,
On the way to the betrothal of Meng-wo.
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539 But not half a month after the betrothal was made,
Yen Hui fell ill and lay on the high bed.
First they wrote a letter reporting that he was ill.
Second they wrote a letter reporting that he was dead.
The letter arrived while she was eating.
Tears blowed in her eyes, dropping in pairs.
She put down her chopsticks and read the message.
Read it once, then read it again.
In the message there were no idle words.
There was but sad news that the two were parted.
Meng-wo undid her coiling dragon hairdo and put on the mourning sign.
She took off the gold hairpins and put them inside the dragon box.
Mr. Chang went to the Upper Village to borrow a big horse;
Meng-wo went to the Lower Village and borrowed a sedan chair.
Mr. Chang mounted the horse and went with bowed head.
Meng-wo was behind him still proud and fine.
Mr. Chang turned his head and scolded his daughter:
"Whose family ever brought up a girl to go looking for a man?"
Meng-wo answered her father, saying:
"I am going to the house of Yen to burn filial incense.
Where has there ever been an ox yoked with two yokes?
A horse saddled with two saddles?
A bow fitted with two arrows?
Or a girl who married two husbands?
It is difficult for a horse with two saddles to carry passengers on his back.
A girl married to two men would be the laughing stock of all."
They arrived and were seated in the main hall of the house of Yen.

/108 cont'd/

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They opened up the coffin and took a look at the corpse within.
/109/ Meng-wo's tears flowed in streams.
Then she said to Mr. Yen:
"With the heart to raise your son you did not have the heart to save him.
Now my feelings are in a turmoil.
Livestock, big and small, must not have been slaughtered.
White paper and incense must not have been burned.
Who did not make wishes before the gods?
Who did not burn incense before the altar?"
Hearing Meng-wo's words, Mr. Yen replied:
"Little girl, please listen to my words.
We raised our son with our whole hearts to provide against old age:
To store up grains is to guard against famine in the distant future.
Livestock, big and small, have been slaughtered.
Thousands of pieces of white paper, gold and silver have been burned.
In the morning we killed pigs and sheep as offerings to the ghosts.
At night we killed chickens and ducks as offerings to the five shang /persons who died young/.
Containers of wine were continuously placed on the altar.
Wine was poured before the shrine to make a paste.
Everything was done, but our good wishes were of no avail.
'I'll never get out of bed.'
We replied to our son, saying:
'My son, what has caused your ailment?'
Yen Hui replied to us, saying:
'Please listen to my words now:
I am now struck with a serious illness.
My life will shortly end, and I'll see Yen Wang (king of hell).
When the oil is burned up the light in the lamp coldly dies.
Giving up life, I shall shortly come to Yen Wang.'

/109 cont'd/

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To this we replied, saying:
'Son, why do you utter these words?
/110/ You have been betrothed for only half a month on this earth.
Why do you give up life and go to the place of the departed?'
Yen Hui replied to us, saying:
'Father and mother, please listen to my words.
When death arrives, there is no distinction between old and young.
The breath in my throat is getting short--I cannot bear it for long.
Everyone in the world wants to live a hundred years.
I am unlucky, and my life cannot be long.
Yen Wang does not care whether a person is old or young.
He does not think of it when he marks with his pen in the register.
Everyone wants to be a son of heaven.
My luck is short, and I cannot desire so much.
Please send word to my betrothed:
I pray that Meng-wo will marry another man.'
Then his body was bathed with scented water,
And placed in a coffin of red silk.
Before yellow leaves have fallen, a green one has dropped.
We sent cassocks everywhere for people to wear.
We know that Meng-wo's gods have taken his life away.
We know that our son's life was short."
When Meng-wo heard these words
She meditated for a long time.
Then she took a key and opened a basket.
She took a key and opened a box.
She took out red silk cloth two changs long.
She took out red silk cloth two changs long.
At the first night watch she hung herself, at the second night watch she was dead.
Husband and wife both lay dead in the hall.

/110 cont'd/

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Then they bought a long plank of wood,
For Meng-wo to be put upon.
/111/ When the Taoist priests had finished the funeral ceremony,
Husband and wife were sent up the hillside.
They were carried over the Yellow River with nine turns.
They were carried over the Yellow River with nine turns.
On the left there was the Green Dragon, on the right the White Tiger.
From behind the Jade Goddess protects their grave site.
In front the scarlet bird* comes to pay its respects.

/* A position in geomancy./

At the back were fierce tigers facing spotted leopards.
Sing to the end the ancient tale of Meng-wo.
So that it will be spread over the five lakes and the four seas.

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In addition to the above, there are the Song of San Pe Ying T'ai /"the three heroic elders"/, the Song of Chiu Niang /"the three girls"/, the Song of T'ang Hsien Chang Shih Niang /"the ten women of T'ang Hsien Chang"/, the Song of Mai Ch'en, etc. All of them are well engraved in the heart of every Miao. Because they are all lengthy pieces, space does not permit us to include them in the present report.

/112/ Chapter IX. Intergroup Relations between the Chinese, the Li, and the Miao.

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The Chinese constitute the majority of the inhabitants of Hainan Island. Next are the Li and the Miao. The intergroup relationship of the three ethnic groups—the Chinese, the Li, and the Miao, particularly the first two—has constituted an /important/ part of the history of Hainan, and naturally it still will be at the core of problems

8: Graham E-5 (1921-1936) 1937 AE5 Miao AE5

534 Jointed bugles and cymbals and brass gongs are more rarely used but they can be played at almost any time.

574 The Ch'uan Miao are very hospitable. A friend can stay in a home for a week or ten days and he will be given food and a bed and charged nothing for them. Chickens are considered especially good and appropriate for entertaining guests. Sometimes both a cock and a hen are killed and some of the meat may be left for the guest to take home with him. The greatest hospitality a Ch'uan Miao can show is to kill a young grown cow or bull and to give a feast to which other friends are invited. Next in importance to a cow is a sheep or goat, then a pig and then a chicken.

572 Friendship among the Ch'uan Miao is sincere and deep and they respond to friendship and kindly treatment. By the very tones of the voice it can be discerned whether the Ch'uan Miao is very friendly and familiar with the person to whom he is speaking, or only fairly so, or not at all, or is an enemy.

V. SOCIAL CUSTOMS

831 Friendship, fellowship, appreciation, sympathy, love and marriage between the sexes is as natural as eating, and they are craved by most people of both sexes. The sex appeal may be one of the most powerful influences for good or for evil. If satisfaction cannot be had in normal and approved ways it will often be sought in ways that are irregular and harmful.

The life of the average Ch'uan Miao, who lives in a simple hut on a high mountain, with no pictures or ornaments in the home, no schools or books, meager furniture, much hard work, few neighbors, simple food, no theatricals and little or no play, is humdrum. It is not unnatural that aside from eating sexual love and sexual intercourse are among the primary enjoyments of life.

The Ch'uan Miao customs in the past have apparently been such that affection between men and women resulted in sexual intercourse, generally illicit. Nearly all the love songs tell of love affairs between men and other men's wives or between women and men to whom they were not married but with whom they enjoyed sexual relations. Some of the legends express disapproval of parents who raised objections because young men were spending the nights in the bedrooms of their daughters and others mention with approval the fact that parents purposely had outside doors for the bedrooms of their daughters so that their lovers could easily enter and spend the night there.

[168 cont.]

776 tormenting human beings, they have no fear at all of these bad spirits, contrary to what we have seen in the "Thai" and especially in the "Man." Also the "Thai" and the "Man" consider the "Méo" as men of a special species.

774 775 [169] The "Méo" think that men have three souls, "pli," that reincarnate themselves in the bodies of pregnant women. (See note on page 178.)

793 They have the priest-sorcerers who preside at the ceremonies and have the power of communicating with the spirits. These priests are illiterate and receive no initiation. The tribal traditions, the curtailed rites, and the few formulas of exorcism or of incantation are orally transmitted. The office is usually hereditary.

796 The "Méo" celebrate a great many festivals, which are so many occasions for having a spree. At the beginning of the year, the spirits of heaven, of the earth, and of the hearth are especially feted, as well as the ancestors. At planting time, sacrifices are made to the spirit of the mountains, protector of the crops. After the harvest, further sacrifices to the spirit of the mountains and to the ancestors. The third day of the fifth month, a special celebration at the time of the harvesting of medicinal herbs. Besides these ceremonies on fixed dates, the "Méo" carefully celebrate the anniversaries of births and of other happy events. All these festivals consist of feasting and drinking intermingled with songs and dances. The "Méo" nature is carefree and very gay; he loves music and dancing. The songs, in "Méo" dialect, are always obscene and even erotic. The dance, performed only by the men, is most often done while playing the "sen." The player keeps his knees bent and the upper part of his body leaning forward. He jumps from one foot to the other, either while turning about or going forward or backward, but without ceasing his playing. (Photo 155, Plate 40.)

[527] [157] [831] [533] [535]

524 The "Méo" children very often play the game of the revolving seesaw, which they probably got from the Chinese. A solid post, deeply planted in the earth, terminates at its upper end in a central peg, on which is balanced a very big pole, which has for this purpose a hole through its center. This pole is movable horizontally about the axis formed by the central peg described above. It is also movable

/87 cont./

told that the gibbons and monkeys, which animate the primeval forest in the neighborhood of the villages, put the babies in the laps of the women. Thus, among the Meau, the apes occupy the position of our stork. The explanation of the facts of life is given to the children of the Meau at the time of puberty at the latest.

Onanism, homosexuality, and other sexual perversions are not found among either the Akha or the Meau. In most instances I did not even succeed in explaining these concepts to my informants, but when I did, they indignantly denied their occurrence, pointing out that the ancestors and spirits would prevent such perversions.

Within the incest prohibitions, which apply not only to marriage, but also to free love (see the section, "Marriage Obstacles and Regulations," in this chapter) and are strictly observed, since a violation, according to the belief of the natives, would be immediately punished by the ancestors and spirits, the choice of a partner is completely free for the young men, whereas public opinion, but not the young men themselves, demands chastity of the girl. In practice, however, the demands of public opinion only result in secrecy, by boys as well as girls, about everything that is connected with sexual life.

In the case of younger boys, the older girls take the initiative by flirtation, at which they are masterfully adept. It often happens that a girl who teaches a young boy /88/ the arts of love-making later on becomes his chief wife, since she most likely will become pregnant. Older boys, on the other hand, often assume the training of the young girls. We frequently had an opportunity to observe an open flirtation. My wife wrote about one such observation in her journal: "May, the chief's daughter, is probably about sixteen years old and is a typical 'teen-ager' in behavior. She giggles at the least thing or bursts into loud peals of laughter over a remark shouted at her by one of the boys. It is loudest, however, when several girls are assembled. They chatter and laugh so loudly and unrestrainedly, even when we are working nearby, that we are